

God's Ambassadors

Studies on the Westminster Assembly



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THE WESTMINSTER
ASSEMBLY PROJECT

God's Ambassadors

THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY
AND THE REFORMATION OF THE
ENGLISH PULPIT, 1643–1653

Chad Van Dixhoorn



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God's Ambassadors

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For my parents,
because they made me listen to sermons.

Sumus inter homines angeli; inter illos qui regi regum inserviunt.

—Oliver Bowles, assembly member

Albeit thy preacher bee a man of no very extraordinary gifts, yet in regard he is an Ambassadour sent from God unto thee if he faithfully (though perhaps not so eloquently) deliver his message unto thee thou oughtst to heare it; and honour him for his Masters sake. His feete cannot but seeme beautifull to thee if they be shod with the Preparation of the Gospell of Peace.

—Daniel Featley, assembly member

The mayne errand of the ambassadour of the gospel, is that sinners would be converted to God; the guilty sinner that knowes he deserves nothing but wrath, when he heares of an ambassador, he expects to heare something from an angry God.... [but] the gospel is called the gospel of peace.

—A student's notes on a sermon preached by
Anthony Tuckney, assembly member

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Foreword

It is a rare privilege to introduce a book by saying with a fair degree of confidence that its author is a leading world authority on his subject and that its theme fits into a larger area in which he is almost certainly *the* leading world authority. But in the case of *God's Ambassadors* this is simply the fact of the matter. Dr. Chad Van Dixhoorn has already put both scholarship and the church in his debt through his groundbreaking researches into the discussions, debates, and writings of the divines of the Westminster Assembly. Now he puts us further in his debt with this absorbing exploration of their views on preaching—a subject very close to his own heart.

Anything that Dr. Van Dixhoorn writes in this area commands our attention. But this book carries a special attraction because it combines a double interest of the author—the assembly proceedings on the one hand, and the topic of preaching on the other. It should, therefore, engage the interest not only of scholars but also of those who make the most use the documents of the assembly (or should!), namely ministers and preachers. Not only those who trace their theological and ecclesiastical roots back through the Westminster Assembly, but all who have an interest in and concern for preaching should find in *God's Ambassadors* much to inform, stimulate, and cause reflection.

There are at least three particular reasons for commending this book. The first is that it combines scholarly excellence with practical relevance. Students of the Westminster Assembly are always eager for further insight into the thinking of the divines. Preachers worth their salt always want to grow in their calling to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2). Indeed, if Paul’s exhortation to Timothy is anything to go by, such growth is not only a great desideratum but also an apostolic command (1 Tim. 4:15)!

A second reason is the sheer fascination of the narrative itself. Here we read the hair-raising, eye-popping descriptions of scandalous ministers given by John White, a member of both Parliament and the assembly. Here too, we are given indications of the corruption of a pastoral system, reminding us why Milton’s *Lycidas* described some ministers in acidic

terms: “Blind Mouths, The hungry sheep look up and are not fed.” We are left in little doubt about the impoverished levels to which much preaching had sunk in seventeenth-century England. It is in this context that we are introduced to the deeply serious discussions of men whose chief goal in life was to communicate the gospel of Christ. And in passing we are given occasional glimpses of the idiosyncratic—such as the inclusion of the autopsy report in the published version of Simeon Ashe’s funeral sermon for Jeremiah Whitaker!

A third reason is that this new study should help to highlight what must rank as one of the most stimulating two-page summaries of preaching thus far published in the English language—namely, the Directory on Preaching set within the larger Directory for the Public Worship of God. It would be rash to suggest that its counsels should be followed in the twenty-first-century church *au pied de la lettre*. Nevertheless, it provides a series of extremely valuable and thought-provoking principles for modern preachers to take into account and make contemporary as they address congregations and audiences 350-plus years further on in the church’s life.

There is so much else here. To improve the level of preaching in the country was only one of the assembly’s multifaceted concerns. But it gave rise to many sessions of discussion and doubtless much private conversation (how fascinating it would be if every assembly member had followed the Scots commissioner Robert Baillie’s example and left behind volumes of *Letters and Journals!*). In addition, a group of men who conducted five thousand ministerial examinations must have something to say to the modern church about the prerequisites for and principles governing gospel ministry. All this and more *God’s Ambassadors* brings before the reader, along with a veritable cornucopia of quotations that both interest and instruct. All in all, *God’s Ambassadors* provides stimulation on every page.

Authors as well as actors sometimes find themselves “typecast.” I can imagine that Dr. Van Dixhoorn might well want to be set free from our hopes and expectation that he will continue to publish on the Westminster Assembly and its work. But if he were to move on to pastures new, in common with many others for whom the assembly and its productions have long been of interest, I for one would be glad that in this work he has chosen to write on the much overlooked theme of the divines’ discussions of preaching. So in addition to the rare privilege of introducing a book by a world authority, it is also a pleasure to be able to suggest to readers that the pages that follow contain a feast of good things.

Sinclair B. Ferguson

SERIES PREFACE

Studies on the Westminster Assembly

The Westminster Assembly (1643–1653) met at a watershed moment in British history, at a time that left its mark on the English state, the Puritan movement, and the churches of England, Scotland, and Ireland. The Assembly also proved to be a powerful force in the methodization and articulation of Reformed theology. Certainly the writings of the gathering created and popularized doctrinal distinctions and definitions that—to an astonishing degree and with surprising rapidity—entered the consciousness and vocabulary of mainstream Protestantism.

The primary aim of this series is to produce accessible scholarly monographs on the Westminster Assembly, its members, and the ideas that the Assembly promoted. Some years ago, Richard Muller challenged post-Reformation historians to focus on identifying “the major figures and... the major issues in debate—and then sufficiently [raise] the profile of the figures or issues in order to bring about an alteration of the broader surveys of the era.” This is precisely the remit of these Studies on the Westminster Assembly, and students of post-Reformation history in particular will be treated to a corpus of material on the Westminster Assembly that will enable comparative studies in church practice, creedal formulation, and doctrinal development among Protestants.

This series will also occasionally include editions of classic Assembly studies, works that have enjoyed a shaping influence in Assembly studies, are difficult to obtain at the present time, and pose questions that students of the Assembly need to answer. It is our hope that this series—in both its new and reprinted monographs—will both exemplify and encourage a newly invigorated field of study and create essential reference works for scholars in multiple disciplines.

John R. Bower
Chad Van Dixhoorn

Preface

Ordered, That the Committee for plundered Ministers shall nominate none to any Parsonage or Benefice, but such as shall first be examined by the Assembly of Divines, or any Five of them, and approved of by Certificate under their Hands: And the Assembly is desired to appoint a Committee to this Purpose.

—House of Commons, July 27, 1643

This day the Assembly of Divines sate at Westmin. for the trial of severall persons which are to be admitted into the Ministry.

—*The Moderate Publisher of Every Daies Intelligence*,
March 24, 1653

Of all the tasks assigned to the Westminster Assembly, only one persisted from 1643 to 1653: the examination of preachers.¹ Every other endeavor of the assembly was either completed or abandoned as the years dragged on. But from its first weeks to its final days, apprehensive preachers waited in the antechamber next to the Jerusalem Chamber for their turn to be interviewed and assessed by the “Assembly of Divines,” as the last great Protestant synod was known in the seventeenth century. These ministers and ministerial candidates hoped to leave the abbey with a certificate of approval to enter a new pastoral charge. And they knew that it would be granted only if they approximated the kind of preacher that could play a part in the assembly’s attempted reformation of the English church.

The Westminster Assembly, summoned by the Long Parliament (1640–1653) in an attempt to reform the Church of England, was obsessed with pulpit reform. The gathering not only conducted thousands of examinations

1. See *Journal of the House of Commons, 1643–1644* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1802), 3:183 (July 27, 1643); and *The Moderate Publisher of Every Daies Intelligence*, Num. 90, Friday, March 18 to Friday, March 25, 1652 (London, 1652), 771. The inclusive term “preachers” is employed because it encompasses both candidates for the ministry and ordained ministers.

of preachers (expending more sessions scrutinizing men than drafting documents!) but it also had a lot to say about preaching and the importance of the pulpit in the texts that it eventually produced.

In the hope of properly tuning expectations, it needs to be said at the outset that this book is not a history of the assembly. The assembly and its work have recently attracted interest from ecclesiastical, historical, theological, and literary quarters, and there have been efforts in the past few decades to highlight one or another aspect of the gathering's work or to produce materials and tools for a do-it-yourself history.² Nonetheless, my "life" of the assembly as a whole is still in progress, and it will require more pages than this volume provides.

Nor is this an account of the personalities impacted by the assembly. The stories of those who were examined by the assembly are not told here. The parliamentary archives in Westminster Palace and accounts of clergy by John Walker and Edmund Calamy (1600–1666) are the proper starting places for such biographical or metabiographical pursuits.³

2. Recent publications on the Westminster Assembly have focused on the synod's members, its theology, texts, or some aspect of its work; these will complement and enrich a new history of the Westminster Assembly but offer no direct competition to it. For studies of assembly members, see J. Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Y. Cho, *Anthony Tuckney (1599–1670): Theologian of the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, forthcoming). For recent theological studies, see R. Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2009); J. V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2014); and C. B. Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith: A Reader's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014). For a textual study, see John Bower, *The Larger Catechism: A Critical Text and Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010). For recent studies of the assembly, see H. Powell, *The Crisis of British Protestantism: Church Power in the Puritan Revolution, 1638–44* (n.p.: Manchester University Press, 2015); C. B. Van Dixhoorn, "Politics and Religion in the Westminster Assembly and the 'Grand Debate,'" in *Alternative Establishments in Early Modern Britain and Ireland: Catholic and Protestant*, ed. R. Armstrong and T. O'hAnnrachain (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 129–48; and C. B. Van Dixhoorn, "The Westminster Assembly and the Reformation of the 1640s," in *The Oxford History of Anglicanism*, vol. 1, *Reformation and Identity c.1520–1662*, ed. A. Milton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Even the account available in the first volume of C. B. Van Dixhoorn, ed., *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) serves more as a narrative map for the assembly's minutes and a key to the gathering's papers than a proper history. It is a guide for those who are able to construct parts of the assembly's history for themselves.

3. A. G. Matthews, ed., *Walker Revised: Being a Revision of John Walker's "Sufferings of the Clergy during the Grand Rebellion, 1642–1660"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948); A. G. Matthews, ed., *Calamy Revised: Being a Revision of Edmund Calamy's Account of the Ministers and Others Ejected and Silenced, 1600–1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934); T. Richards, *A History of the Puritan Movement in Wales from the Inception of the Church at Llanfaches in 1639 to the Expiry of the Propagation Act in 1653* (London: The National Eisteddfod Association,

This book is also not a study of sermons—another topic that has not been ignored in recent years. The most comprehensive study of sermons is no doubt Hughes Oliphant Old's magisterial survey *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*.⁴ The most creative study may be Arnold Hunt's, who thought to ask how people heard sermons; his book also offers one of the best surveys of the study of early modern preaching.⁵ Work on early modern sermons themselves continues apace with coordinated seminars drawing together experts in English literature, divinity, and history. Although the weight of recent studies may tilt toward those preachers best recognized and promoted by the Church of England's establishment, there is hardly any real imbalance in the past century of sermonic study. The preaching of puritans has been plundered for every historical and theological purpose and has been the subject of innumerable learned essays, monographs, and theses. Admittedly, even treatments of so narrow a subject have often been too wide-ranging, without clearly defined subject samples or controlled chronological boundaries; still other studies have exalted individual preachers or single sermons as representatives of their contemporaries or as exemplars for present preachers to imitate with minimal modification. I mention this not because I am suiting up for a battle nor because *God's Ambassadors* is posturing to supplant these prior descriptions of preaching. I am simply noting the currents of scholarship characteristic especially in theological seminaries and flagging the fact that this study will take a different tack.

On a positive note, I happily admit that this book can afford to be concise precisely because of the huge amount of work already accomplished by other historians of preaching. It is also brief because of my own insistence that this be first and foremost a focused study of the Westminster Assembly and its members. It is only secondarily, and hypothetically, a sampling or particular instance of a larger movement of reinvigorated puritan preaching during the English civil wars and interregnum.

So what is this book? I have often asked that question myself, for it offers neither a straightforward narrative nor a thematically organized collection of essays. The best that I can offer by way of answer is that it is a three-legged treatment of the Westminster Assembly's endeavor to reform the pulpit in England from 1643 to 1653. It first tells the story of the puritan

1920); C. E. Surman, ed., *The Register-Booke of the Fourth Classis in the Province of London, 1646–1659* (London, 1953); Parliamentary Archives, Main Papers of the House of Lords.

4. Seven volumes have appeared under the general title of *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998–2010).

5. A. Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); see esp. his masterful introduction.

quest for a reformation in preachers and preaching and how the Westminster Assembly tried to play a part in that movement. The second part of the book looks at the assembly's own reform efforts, tracing its debates and exploring key documents on the subject of preaching. These chapters both highlight disagreements within the assembly's ranks and showcase the gathering's collective plan for the church going forward. The final cluster of chapters seeks to set forth the rationale behind the assembly's writings and reforms, both in terms of biblical exegesis and practical theology. It is there that I infer why the assembly did what it did; I attempt to illustrate what its members were looking for as they probed men's lives and listened to men preach.

Hopefully these three legs will together strike readers as something like a well-supported step stool for future research. I recognize that some will conclude that this study is still lacking something, that it looks more like a maimed quadruped missing an appendage. All I can offer in response are a few appendices at the conclusion of the book along with my sense that a fuller study has always been just out of my reach, given other projects also in progress, and my hope that a limited study is better than none at all. While I hope that readers will brave their way through all the chapters of the book, it may be worth noting that the first two parts of *God's Ambassadors* may be most interesting to historians, the last part to practitioners of preaching. The work as a whole is intended chiefly for pastors, seminary students, and theologians, although the subject of preaching—and the attempt to find good preaching—is of perennial interest to people who listen to sermons.

Acknowledgments

The subject of the Westminster Assembly and preaching was my oldest academic love, and a thesis on the topic was the first child of my research, taking the form of a graduate thesis at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Although no pages from that study survive intact in *God's Ambassadors*, a few paragraphs do. Where this book finds its real continuity with that thesis is in the revival of my twin interests in synods and sermons.

Since the completion of that master's thesis sixteen years ago (an endeavor that felt more like the beginning of something than the end) I have spent most of my time considering the Westminster Assembly, preaching on a regular basis, training preachers, and occasionally thinking about how these three things relate. While working as a fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge, and then during a British Academy post-doctoral fellowship in the history faculty at the University of Cambridge, I put together some lectures on the Westminster Assembly and preaching. Subsequently, I was invited to share my thoughts in a variety of stimulating contexts. Evangelical Anglicans first encouraged the study when I was asked to deliver the 2005 St. Antholin lecture. Historians at the Dr. Williams's Centre for Dissenting Studies in London then heard some more developed lines of argument in 2006. And snippets were delivered to ministers at a Banner of Truth conference in Leicester in 2007.

In 2008 I began *God's Ambassadors* in earnest, focusing especially on the assembly's debates and members' writings. I wrote a full draft of the work before becoming convinced that I needed to spend more time pillaging the assembly's own texts on the subject. At that point I was called to serve as one of the pastors of a church near Washington, D.C., and so the book had to take a backseat, or back pew.

In 2013 I received another opportunity to complete the work: A generous fellowship was offered by the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., that wonderful resource for early modern history, literature, and theology, conveniently located next door to another

unparalleled local institution, the Library of Congress. I rewrote most of the book that spring, but unfortunately, on the second-to-last day of the fellowship, I discovered what I considered to be a more compelling way to present my material. I asked the publisher to wait for a later installment, took some notes on how the book ought to look, and went back to preaching and teaching.

It was only in 2015, with a new appointment from Reformed Theological Seminary that graciously allowed me a first year of lightened teaching duties, that I was able to consider bringing this book to completion. Therefore, as I see it, I owe a debt to four institutions: Westminster Theological Seminary, where I came to appreciate the assembly and preaching in new ways; the University of Cambridge, where I began the book; the Folger, where most of the writing was done; and Reformed Theological Seminary, which enabled this study to be brought to completion.

During the long evolution of this book many people read drafts of one or more chapters, including Melanie Westerveld, Mark Burkill, Jason Rampelt, Alison Searle, Polly Ha, Douglas McCallum, Andy Young, Justen Ellis, John Morrill, John Bower, Stephen Tracey, and students both at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and at Reformed Theological Seminary. Polly's comments particularly shaped the 2008 embodiment of the book, John Bower's the final version, and John Morrill's both versions. The study was also advanced by the opportunity to consider the assembly and exegesis in an essay later published in a festschrift for Palmer Robertson.¹ Portions of that chapter and of the printed St. Antholin lecture have found their way into this study. I am thankful for all of these friends and their interest in this developing study, and for Sinclair Ferguson who found the time to write a foreword to this book. Additional thanks go to Andrew Buss of Collaborative Editorial Solutions for his expert copyediting and to Jay Collier and his staff at Reformation Heritage Books who guided *God's Ambassadors* from manuscript into print.

I hope it has been obvious through the years that I appreciate the people who have shaped my thinking or who have provided occasions for me to speak or write on this subject. Nonetheless, I wish to especially acknowledge my gratitude for my parents, Henry and Thea Van Dixhoorn, who took me to churches that understood the power of a good sermon and to whom this book is dedicated. Words cannot tell how thankful I am for my children and their support and for my wife, Emily, who is a source of

1. C. B. Van Dixhoorn, "Preaching Christ in Post-Reformation Britain," in *The Hope Fulfilled: Essays in Honor of O. Palmer Robertson*, ed. R. L. Penny (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2008), 361–89.

joy, wisdom, and good advice. Among her most useful encouragements is the oft-repeated dictum that if I can't write something well I should at least write it poorly—and then try to fix it later. I believe that with this volume, I have followed Emily's advice at least three times.

Abbreviations

Add. MS	Additional manuscript
Baillie, <i>Letters</i>	Robert Baillie, <i>Letters and Journals</i> , ed. D. Laing (Edinburgh: for Robert Ogle, 1841–42), 3 vols.
BL	The British Library, London
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CUL	Cambridge University Library
CUL Dd XIV.28(4)	Cambridge University Library, manuscript notes of John Lightfoot on the proceedings of the assembly (not in Lightfoot's <i>Works</i>). Transcription in C. B. Van Dixhoorn, "Reforming the Reformation: Theological Debate at the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2004), vol. 2.
EUL	Edinburgh University Library
FSL	Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C.
Lightfoot, <i>Journal</i>	J. Lightfoot, <i>The Whole Works of the Rev. John Lightfoot</i> , ed. J. R. Pitman (London: J. F. Dove, 1824), vol. 13.
MPWA	C. B. Van Dixhoorn, ed., <i>The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), vols. 1–5.
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
PA	Parliamentary Archives, Westminster

- PRRD* R. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 4 vols.
- WCF* The Westminster Confession of Faith, in J. R. Bower, ed., *The Confession of Faith: A Critical Text and Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, forthcoming).
- WLC* The Westminster Larger Catechism, in J. R. Bower, ed., *The Larger Catechism: A Critical Text and Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010).
- WSC* *The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, Now by Authority of Parliament Sitting at Westminster, concerning a Shorter Catechism, with the Proofs thereof out of the Scriptures, Presented by Them Lately to Both Houses of Parliament. A Certain Number of Copies Are Ordered to Be Printed Onely for the Use of the Members of Both Houses and of the Assembly of Divines, to the End That They May Advise Thereupon* (London: J. F., [1648]).

Note on Dating

The English New Year in the 1640s, and in the centuries preceding, did not begin on January 1. Instead it began on Lady Day, March 25. This older form of dating the commencement of the year is now called Old Style, and our current form, with the year beginning January 1, is called New Style.

In Scotland, however, New Style dating was used beginning in the year 1600. As readers can imagine, this makes telling a story that involves both England and Scotland a little more challenging. For example, the Westminster Assembly (based in England) would date its finished review of its Psalms translation as February 1646 (Old Style). Both today and in seventeenth-century Scotland, that same event would be dated February 1647 (New Style).

This difference in dating, of course, affects dates between January 1 and March 24 only; for the remainder of the year, the two styles of dating are in agreement. Nonetheless, to minimize confusion for readers of *God's Ambassadors*, this study converts all dates in the historical narrative between January 1 and March 24 to New Style. The publication information provided in the footnotes for books, however, is left unchanged—thus, English books are dated in Old Style and Scottish books in New Style.

One more note on dating: where a person's life date is rendered, for example, "d. 1646/7," it indicates that the person died either in one year or the other, in this case 1646 or 1647. A similar scheme is used for birth dates when the precise year is unknown.

PART I

Blind Guides and Scandalous Ministers

The Westminster Assembly was appointed by Parliament to reform the Church of England since the majority of Parliament wanted change and did not think the church would reform itself. The assembly was charged to propose changes for Parliament's consideration—changes in worship, church government, and doctrine. In addition to this, the assembly established (with Parliament's blessing) a national system of examinations, a filter through which all preachers had to pass. It was an attempt to address perceived weaknesses in English preaching by means of sifting through England's preachers.

The assembly's own work is introduced in part 2, but first the assembly's reforms are put in various contexts. Chapter 1 places the assembly's statements and this study in its theological and historiographical contexts, introducing the assembly's perspectives on preaching and exploring the relationship between the assembly and puritanism. The following two chapters place the synod's work in its ecclesiological and political ecosystems, for the Westminster Assembly's commitment to preaching reforms had precedents in earlier puritan history, and this history of commitment and complaint is traced in chapter 2, "The Road to Reform."

The stage on which the events of the assembly were to be played out, however, was civil war London, or rather Westminster, as King Charles I and a rebel Parliament engaged in a high stakes battle for control of the political process, the economy, and the church. The massive unrest of the middle decades of the seventeenth century, discussed in chapter 3, "Democratick Annarchie"—a phrase borrowed from Robert Baillie (1602–1662), offering a Scotsman's perspective on England—provides a lively context for reading the assembly's texts and viewing its activities. Arguably, this political and religious turmoil makes the gathering's measured statements about preaching appear more interesting today and perhaps more relevant.

CHAPTER 1

The Call for Reform

This ensuing summary declaration, of the grounds and causes, whereupon this parliament hath proceeded against divers ministers, to sequester their benefices from them, and to place in their roomes, godly, learned, orthodox divines, diligent preachers of the Word of God, may serve thee for many excellent purposes.... Thou maiest hereby discern one principall ground and cause of the general ignorance and debauchery of the gentry and people of this kingdome. Like priest, like people.

—John White, member of Parliament

“Like priest, like people.”¹ In a nominally Christian society like England, as in all Constantinian church-state arrangements, the welfare of the *polis* was tethered to the well-being of the *ecclesia*. Or to put it the other way around, when a tide of ignorance or immorality affected the church, it invariably affected the state. This meant that the governments of both institutions felt an obligation to cooperate in reform, or at least to inform the other of its duties.

The intertwining of church and state gave ministers of church and state a degree of freedom to intermeddle with each other’s affairs, but it did not mean that the two parties enjoyed an equal authority and influence. In England, at least since the Reformation, and for some centuries prior, the state was preeminent in power. In the 1640s this was evidenced by the fact that it was the English Parliament that summoned the Westminster Assembly and that required the synod to effect governmental and liturgical reforms, suggest doctrinal clarifications, and address various practical concerns related to the church. The shape and main tasks of the assembly were directed by the two houses of Parliament. In fact, the House of Lords and the House of Commons added thirty of their own number as observers to the gathering, and the assembly meeting at Westminster Abbey was

1. J. White, *The First Century of Scandalous, Malignant Priests, Made and Admitted into Benefices by the Prelates* (London, 1643), sig. A2.

required to submit all of its reports and discuss all of its substantial disagreements with the men meeting across the street at Westminster Palace.²

The assembly would attempt to shape the direction of reform obliquely—most often by way of petitions that were declared to be “humble” at the head of each document but that could be direct, even brash in the main body of a letter. A July 1643 petition by the assembly offers an excellent example of direct, almost impatient communication. Its tone was felt to be justifiable because the nation was in desperate trouble. Members thought their day was marked by a “bruitish ignorance” with a “palpable darknesse possessing the greatest part of the people in all places of the Kingdome.” The gospel was in “great dishonour” and “pouere soules” were in everlasting danger.³

One of the chief problems in the kingdom had to do with the ministry of the church, and thus it was of some encouragement that during the winter and spring of 1643 a parliamentary committee had begun ejecting scandalous clergymen from their churches.⁴ John White, a parliamentary member of the Westminster Assembly, publicly catalogued the failings of a hundred ministers ejected from their pulpits from London and the surrounding area. His book had the (no doubt intended) effect of suggesting that all ministers thus ejected would be equally scandalous, which was surely not true. It also implied that bishops, had they received reports of the activities of these ministers, would have done nothing about it. This was not fair; it has been estimated that about a quarter of the ministers in England were under the oversight of bishops sympathetic to the concerns of the godly, and even those bishops who supported the anti-puritan policies of Archbishop William Laud had concern for morals.⁵ But the book did highlight inefficiencies or lapses in episcopal oversight and perhaps the opportunity costs associated with the Laudian practice of hounding puritans, whereas the worst excesses persisted right under their noses.

White's tawdry tale begins with John Wilson of Arlington, accused of buggery and attempted bestiality, and drifts into accounts of drunken ministers and “popishly affected” pastors (perhaps the two most common complaints) as well as accounts of clergy who were womanizers, rapists, thieves, gamblers, Sabbath-breakers, and outspoken critics of Parliament. The pamphlet offers accounts of battery, sexual assault, verbal abuse in

2. See C. B. Van Dixhoorn, “Scottish Influence on the Westminster Assembly: A Study of the Synod's Summoning Ordinance and the Solemn League and Covenant,” *The Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 37 (2007): 55–88.

3. *MPWA*, 5:10 (Doc. 1).

4. *MPWA*, 1:217.

5. For the estimate of sympathetic bishops, see J. T. Cliffe, *The Puritan Gentry: The Great Puritan Families of Early Stuart England* (London: Routledge, 1984), 171.

the home (one minister threatening to burn his wife and children alive), bribery, neglect of the pulpit, flirting from the pulpit, misogynist jokes from the pulpit, making a business venture out of burials, begging for money during Communion, and bad-tempered behavior: throwing Communion elements on the ground, name-calling from the pulpit, public cursing, even excommunicating a lame man who did not kneel at Communion. The credibility of these accounts is enhanced by the enumeration of places and names (including, unfortunately, the names of victims), by the fact that these all constituted cases tried publicly (at least by Parliament, if not in the regular courts), and by the fact that the book was printed with parliamentary authority.⁶

White's booklet focused on ministers near the metropolis, but of course problematic pastors were scattered all across the nation and so the assembly would continue to petition Parliament to rid the land of inept pastors, sectarian pastors, popish pastors, and all lay preachers.⁷ But as the assembly saw it, their "Wisdomes" across the street (a compliment, not a snide comment) also needed to "find out some way to admit into the Ministry such godly and hopefull men as have prepared themselves and are willing thereunto." Without this positive effort, "there will suddenly be such a scarcity of able and faithfull Ministers, that it will be to little purpose to cast out such as are unable, idle or scandalous."⁸ In addressing the matter of ministers, the assembly was making a point about preachers, and they were doing so in words that members of Parliament would easily understand: The "unable" and "idle" men to be removed from churches were non-preaching ministers—mere "blinde guides." Those "prepared" and "willing" to take their places, on the other hand, would be able to proclaim the Word itself rather than read the printed sermons of others or, worse, administer sacraments without preaching at all.

The Assembly and Preaching

Members of the Westminster Assembly believed that a ministry designed by God "for the gathering and perfecting of the saints" is above all else to be a preaching ministry. In the assembly's 1646 Confession and in its 1647 Larger Catechism there are frequent references to the minister—who for them, would also always be a preacher.⁹ Ministers, along with magistrates,

6. White, *First Century of Scandalous, Malignant*.

7. *MPWA*, 5:11 (Doc. 1; inept preachers); *MPWA*, 5:22–23 (Doc. 4; antinomian preachers); *MPWA*, 5:36 (Doc. 14; popish preachers); *MPWA*, 5:87 (Doc. 31; lay preachers).

8. *MPWA*, 5:11 (Doc. 1); see also *MPWA*, 5:177 (Doc. 61).

9. WCF, 25:3. Robert Godfrey also notes a greater emphasis on the ministry in the Larger Catechism than the Shorter in his essay "The Westminster Larger Catechism" in *To Glorify*

are the people the church is particularly to pray for.¹⁰ Ministers are the sole persons able to administer or dispense the sacraments¹¹ and, with other church officers, administer discipline.¹² Ministers are the ones who are to assemble in synods and, “If magistrates be open enemies to the church, the ministers of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office, . . . may meet together in such assemblies.”¹³

Yet while the minister had all of these duties (and many more), his chief task appears to be preaching. At the head of the list is the fact that “under the gospel . . . Christ the substance [is] exhibited, [and] the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments.” While Christ is preached both in sermon and sacrament, “repentance unto life” and “faith in Christ” is “preached by every minister of the Gospel,” particularly in the sermon.¹⁴ The majority in the assembly held that it is not only by overt censures, particularly those related to the sacrament of the Supper, but also by the regular “ministry of the Gospel” that “the keys of the kingdom of heaven are” exercised in the church “to retain, and remit sins; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, . . . and to open it unto penitent sinners.”¹⁵ For this reason, the Larger Catechism offers parishioners a how-to manual for listening to sermons, and explains that among “the duties required in the second commandment” are “the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his word”—such as “the reading, preaching, and hearing of the word.”¹⁶

The hope that preaching offers the spiritually destitute is a recurring theme in the assembly’s writings. Preaching is one way in which the

and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the Westminster Assembly, ed. J. L. Carson and D. W. Hall (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 138.

10. WLC, 183.

11. WLC, 169, 176; WCF, 27.4; 28.2; 29.3.

12. WCF, 30.2.

13. WCF, 31.2.

14. WCF, 15.1. In referring to the “gospel,” in distinction from “the Gospels,” the assembly has in view teaching about the person and work of Christ.

15. WCF, 30.2. The connection between preaching and the exercising of the keys of the kingdom is also present in the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&As 83–84. In addition to these two questions, the Heidelberg Catechism also states that “the Holy Ghost . . . works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments” (Q&A 65).

16. WLC, 160: “It is required of those that hear the word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine what they hear by the scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives”; see also WLC, 63, 108. The Confession’s chapter “Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day” also lists, in section five, “sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence” as one part of religious worship (WCF, 21:5).

covenant of grace is administered under the New Testament.¹⁷ Through preaching the elect are called out of their sin and into a state of grace. True, not every hearer is saved.¹⁸ What is more, some who are mentally unable to understand the preaching may still be saved,¹⁹ but, as the chapter “Saving Faith” explains, “The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word: by which also [the Word preached], and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it [i.e., faith] is increased and strengthened.”²⁰

The assembly did not offer a vision of preaching that was intended to compete with sacraments or prayer, but nonetheless it is the efficacy of preaching that is underlined repeatedly by the assembly. In one of its texts the assembly would argue for the importance of preaching, insisting that it is one of the duties of a faithful presbytery (a regional gathering of elders) to “admonish, or further to censure” ministers for “Affected lightnesse & vanity in preaching” or for the “willfull neglect of preaching, or slight performance of it.”²¹ In another, the assembly argued that an improperly guarded administration of the Lord’s Supper undoes the good effects of a sermon.²² As it happens, the assembly never put it the other way around, even though the gathering’s members would believe the opposite to be true.

The assembly underlined the importance of preaching and preachers implicitly by mentioning ministers an astonishing thirty-two times in its confession and catechisms. It highlights the preacher’s importance most unusually by giving preaching tips in the Directory for Public Worship. Nonetheless, while any number of citations demonstrate the significance of preaching in the minds of assembly members, nothing so puts into perspective their theory of preaching’s preeminence than the Larger Catechism’s 155th question and answer, “How is the word made effectual to salvation?” The response is clear: “The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.”

17. WLC, 35.

18. WLC, 68; WCF, 10.4.

19. WCF, 10.3.

20. WCF, 14.1.

21. *MPWA*, 5:211 (Doc. 77).

22. *MPWA*, 5:233 (Doc. 83).

Preaching, by this analysis, is something of use to any person prior to and during the whole of the Christian life. It is not that Scripture is to be slighted. Supernaturally, Scripture and sermon are both effectual through the Spirit's work, for the same spiritual purposes. And yet, while the Larger Catechism's list states what preaching "especially" does, it implies that the reading of the Word is able to do the same. For the assembly Scripture is foundational, preaching derivative—only Scripture is "sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation."²³ There is a reason why the assembly, like every other Reformed confessing body, has a chapter on Scripture in its confession and why it was not obliged to offer a chapter on preaching. And yet there can be no doubt that the Westminster Assembly gives preaching a pride of place as an "especially" powerful means of grace.

The prominence of preaching, so heavily underlined in the two catechisms of the assembly, must be kept in perspective not only when compared to the reading of the Word but also when set beside prayer. In describing special worship events such as days of thanksgiving or fasting (days that would always contain preaching), the Westminster Assembly insisted that the main emphasis of the occasion was to be found in the congregation's petitions or praises.²⁴ The fact that prayer is important to the assembly can be seen in other contexts too. Preaching and prayer, as duties of the minister, are usually paired together in enumerations of pastoral responsibilities. Notably, prayer is sometimes put first (and in one of the assembly's catalogues of divine ordinances given for the good of congregations, preaching appears not first, but fifth).²⁵

And that is only the beginning. When the gathering came to write a preface for its Directory for Public Worship, including a history of episcopal abuses, the assembly complained not only about prior attacks on preaching, "justling it out as unnecessary, or, (at best) as farre inferior to the Reading of Common prayer," but also the way in which enforced use of the Book of Common Prayer had led to an "idle, and unedifying ministry" content with "sett forms made to their hands by others, without putting forth themselves to exercise the guift of praier, with which our Lord Jesus Christ pleaseth to furnish all his servants whom he calls to that office."²⁶ Concern to allow freedom for prayer was featured as much as the concern to promote proper preaching.

23. WCF, 1.1.

24. *MPWA*, 5:155–57 (Doc. 53).

25. *MPWA*, 5:56 (Doc. 19), p. 119 (Doc. 42), p. 129 (Doc. 45), pp. 205, 208 (Doc. 77).

26. *MPWA*, 5:119 (Doc. 42).

Nonetheless, most members of the assembly chose to accentuate that, for purposes of persuasion, the most effective weapon in the Spirit's arsenal is the Word of God preached. Coming from an assembly of preachers, this could be decoded as an elongated plea for job security. After all, as Robert Norris points out, there is something unsurprising about a group of preachers stressing preaching.²⁷ Yet the clearest reason for this insistence on preaching appears to be found in the assembly's instructions for hearers, where sermon attendees are told that "it is required of those that hear the word preached, that they...receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the word of God."²⁸ Preachers are delivering the Word of God.

And yet not everything preached is to be considered the "Word of God." Only when the Word is properly interpreted is it God's Word brought to the people. Nor was everyone supposed to preach that Word. While the assembly's Directory for Public Worship stressed that all should read their Bibles, the Larger Catechism stresses that "the word of God is to be preached only by such as are" both "duly approved and called to that office" and "sufficiently gifted."²⁹ The assemblymen believed the exalted Christ sits at the right hand of God, and "furnisheth ministers and people with gifts and graces, and maketh intercession for them."³⁰ Christ gives His people gifts—some the gift of preaching—and commissions the preacher and makes the preaching "a demonstration of the Spirit, and of power," effective by His Spirit and "not in the enticing words of man's wisdom."³¹ Both the communications of the assembly intended only for Parliament and the public texts designed for a wider audience present an elevated and unified view of preaching as the most effective regular means of grace for the church that God has to offer. Together they make it clear that the concern to establish and maintain a faithful preaching ministry is uppermost in the assembly's reforming interests.

27. R. M. Norris, "The Preaching of the Assembly," in *To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the Westminster Assembly* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 65. It should be noted that the divines themselves were hardly in a lucrative position: The Parliament was invariably behind in paying them their already small allowance for their enormous task.

28. WLC, 160.

29. *A Directory for the Publique Worship of God, throughout the Three Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London: for Evan Tyler, Alexander Fifield, Ralph Smith, and John Field, 1644), 13–14; see also WLC, 158.

30. WLC, 54.

31. WLC, 53; WLC, 159, 155.

This Study

It is not the intention of this study to pretend that it was unique for the assembly to stress the importance of preaching or to announce that biblical preaching, with appropriate qualification, is the Word of God.³² Indeed, as the following chapter will demonstrate, this emphasis and these claims were, in fact, part of the assembly's Reformed heritage. The Westminster Assembly's reformation of preaching had more to do with people than ideas. It is not impossible that the theology and practice of preaching took a new turn because of the assembly's writings, but the real story is not that people preached differently because of the Westminster Assembly but that different people were preaching. Preaching was reformed, in the main, by changing the preachers.

At the same time, this revolution in the personnel of the English church is both an important and a neglected story. Perhaps it has received scant attention because the assembly's efforts to reform English pulpits were undone at the Restoration and had no clear impact on Scottish, Irish, or later American history (the contexts in which the assembly's impact was felt most profoundly) and has therefore proved to be of little interest to historians. Only two historians, both of them English, have given it any attention: William Shaw, while discussing the reform of the pulpit from the perspective of Parliament, recognizes that "the approval and certification of ministers was a large part of the Assembly's work."³³ And S. W. Carruthers offers two chapters on the examination of ministers in his collection of essays on the assembly.³⁴ On the other hand, the assembly's work in pulpit reform may also have been neglected, because the minutes and papers of the assembly needed to be edited and collected before the assembly's debates, documents, and work related to the preaching ministry of England could be fully understood. As a component of this project, the *Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly* also showcased the systematic archival and editorial labor of Inga Jones and especially Joel Halcomb, both of whom focused on the identification of persons examined by the assembly and the relationship between the Westminster Assembly and a key committee of the House of Commons.

32. See chapter 2; and Hunt, *Art of Hearing*, chapter one.

33. W. A. Shaw, *A History of the English Church during the Civil Wars and under the Commonwealth, 1640–1660* (London: Longman, Green, 1900), 2:197.

34. S. W. Carruthers, *The Everyday Work of the Westminster Assembly* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1943), ch. 13–17. Carruthers provides lively vignettes relating to the examination of ministers and the supply of ministers. His study is not systematic in its treatment of assembly sources but makes excellent use of the journals of the two houses of Parliament.

Nonetheless, as soon as that work was completed, it raised a pressing historical question: What was the assembly looking for in a preacher? The full story of the assembly's work cannot be told simply in terms of personal histories, assembly procedures, and assembly writings. It must also deal with theological ideas. Most assembly members were advocates of a particular kind of preacher and preaching ministry. They held and developed core commitments concerning ministerial godliness, training, and ordination as well as their convictions about the nature and form of the proclamation itself. This is why this study offers contextual chapters, concentrated reflections on the assembly and its writings, and chapters focused on the activities and writings of assembly members.

Puritanism and Preaching

In what follows, quotations and illustrations are drawn from the speeches and writings of the assemblymen, while narrative portions recount aspects of the assembly's work. For that reason, I ought to have perhaps contented myself with a study about the Westminster Assembly only, and its theology and practice of preaching, especially since the assembly and its members supply the entirety of my subject sampling. In point of fact, a much larger study would be required to demonstrate conclusively that the assembly's membership is a representative sample of puritan thinking on the topic of preachers and preaching.

But can a historian have his cake and eat it too? On the one hand, by focusing on the Westminster Assembly's reformation of preaching I am offering a study that has some strict demographic controls with a clearly defined subject group. On the other hand, I think this study speaks into conversations about puritanism. While there are frequent scuffles over the definition of "puritanism," whenever the dust settles, the members of the assembly are always left standing; no one seriously doubts that they are candidates for the puritan brotherhood. This narrowly defined subject group happens to have been particularly influential, and it would only promote artificial distinctions if we were to isolate the assembly from the wider phenomenon and historiography of puritanism. As later chapters will endeavor to show, the Westminster Assembly proved to be the answer to an almost century-old puritan dream for further reformation in the Church of England.

Of course, to link this study to "puritanism" is to face the nettlesome question of defining and employing the term itself. I remember reading a historian who noted that the definition of puritanism has been discussed to good effect and avoided with equally happy results. As John Coffey and Paul Lim point out, "Defining Puritanism has become a favorite parlour

game for early modern historians.”³⁵ At the same time, there is widespread diffidence among early modern theologians over the thing that is puritanism, the key problem being that the term originated, and was usually applied, as a term of abuse.³⁶

Many readers will know that there is a thriving industry dedicated to defining puritanism in the most negative, most amusing way possible. The combination of dour strictness with which puritans are wont to be stereotyped is wonderfully captured by H. L. Mencken's suggestion that puritanism is “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy,” and by Garrison Keillor's comment that seventeenth-century puritans were the type of people who left for America “in the hope of finding greater restrictions than were permissible under English law at that time.”³⁷

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the epithet “puritan” was reliably employed as a term of opprobrium, not of friendship. To define puritanism through the writings of opponents would be a bit like trying to understand communism by reading the collected writings of Senator Joseph McCarthy or to understand the senator's convictions through the cartoons drawn at his expense.³⁸ In practice I, along with other recent historians, prefer to categorize assembly members and those like them with terms of approval, like “godly,” over terms of abuse, like “puritan.” As Tom Webster explains, the reason for this preference is that “godly” is the term these people preferred for themselves.³⁹ Puritans often called themselves “professors” because they professed faith in God. But they liked to provide adjectives for professors, and “godly” was the most common adjective, often used in a substantive form, “the godly.”

35. J. Coffey and P. C. H. Lim, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

36. For reticence toward the exercise of defining puritanism by a leading scholar of the subject, see P. Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10–11: “The difficulties in defining ‘puritanism’ are easier to identify than solve and I really have nothing original to say on that subject.” For the best brief discussion of the term, see P. Collinson, “Puritans,” *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. H. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 364–70. Cf. Randall Pederson, *Unity in Diversity: English Puritans and the Puritan Reformation, 1603–1689* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), for another recent work devoted to defining Puritanism.

37. V. Fitzpatrick, *H. L. Mencken* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2004), 37; “Garrison Keillor,” in *The Yale Book of Quotations*, ed. F. R. Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 417.

38. I am only adding color to a similar analogy suggested by M. G. Finlayson in *Historians, Puritanism, and the English Revolution: The Religious Factor in English Politics before and after the Interregnum* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 47.

39. T. Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement, c. 1620–1643* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3.

And yet it cannot be denied that the term “puritan,” although an insulting one, is a historical and a historiographical one with which we must reckon. It has been in use at least since 1575, and probably earlier, because in some sense the definition of a puritan was clear enough: Those who were puritans themselves (and not simply those who were their neighbors!) were usually sure about who was in and who was out of the inner circle of the godly.

Yet it is difficult to delineate the meaning of the term with true puritanical rigor. This is in part because puritans were uncertain when to take the term as an insult and when as a compliment. Take the Westminster divines themselves. On one occasion William Gouge (1575–1653) tried to distance himself from the label by giving it a historical referent: the term “puritan” properly referred to ancient separatists who thought themselves perfectly pure.⁴⁰ On another occasion Gouge mentioned that puritans were considered precisians, Sabbatarians, and Jews—a more knotty string of adjectives.⁴¹ Gouge would not consider himself overly precise, nor would he relish being called a Jew. But he was comfortable being called a Sabbatarian. Since the label puritan could imply some positive associations for the godly, its acceptance or rejection must often have relied on the tone of voice in which it was uttered or the context in which it was applied or the person speaking. And so on a third occasion Gouge’s colleagues at King’s College spoke of him derisively as an arch-puritan. But Gouge was willing to pass the story on to his son Thomas, and Thomas was happy to relate the incident in a biographical essay, because both appreciated what it said of the elder Gouge’s piety and attentive study of the Scriptures.⁴²

Definitions of puritanism are further complicated because meanings shift over time. Historians of the late Elizabethan period have argued, plausibly, that the term puritan was used nearly synonymously with presbyterian, a meaning probably carried into the early years of James’s reign.⁴³ Often it was restricted to clergy only, an unhappy descriptor for the “assiduous

40. W. Gouge, *A Guide to Goe to God* (London, 1636), 255.

41. W. Gouge, *The Sabbaths Sanctification* (London, 1641), 30.

42. T. Gouge, in “The Life and Death of Doctor Gouge,” in W. Gouge, *A Learned and Very Useful Commentary on the Whole Epistle to the Hebrewes* (London, 1655), not paginated.

43. See, for example, M. Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 10n25. Here and elsewhere this study deliberately avoids capitalization of terms such as *episcopalian*, *presbyterian*, and *congregationalist*. The capitalization of these words promotes the idea of unified movements, oversimplifying assembly history. After all, the gathering was characterized not only by a tug-of-war between major ecclesiological options but also by intramural contests within these developing traditions. What is more, capitalization of these terms promotes categories that are anachronistic in the 1640s as all of the assembly’s voting members were Church of England ministers, not ministers of discrete denominations.

preacher.”⁴⁴ In later Jacobean and early Caroline years, annoyed English people used the word to refer to all who were strict in their life and perhaps Calvinist in their doctrine, and during the same time period Roman Catholic polemicists tried to use the epithet “puritan” to scare off Englishmen from all things Protestant.⁴⁵ By the 1640s, some among the godly actually began to approve of its use among themselves.⁴⁶ Others applied the term to their forebearers with some affection: godly folk during the civil war spoke about the good old puritans of years gone past.⁴⁷

At the same time, even as godly people were becoming comfortable with the appellation of puritanism, the term may have begun to lose its positive meaning entirely. A puritan was simply, for most people, something that no one in broader society wanted to be. In that case the term functioned as a key part of what Thomas Gataker (1574–1654) called a “negative divinity”: one was acceptable if he was not a papist or schismatic or heretic or a puritan.⁴⁸ If this dual shift in usage is correct—finding acceptance among the godly and as a nondescript term to be avoided by everyone else—then it may explain why the term started to struggle to stand on its own. Like many words that are overworked and underpaid, the term puritan showed its age prematurely. As one reads the literature of the civil wars and the commonwealth (England’s experiment without monarchy), it becomes apparent that layers of adjectives were applied to make the term “puritan” more presentable in public. We begin to read of “doctrinal puritanism,”⁴⁹ of “judaizing puritanism,”⁵⁰ and of “novelizing puritans.”⁵¹ In England, at least, although the godly movement was still characterized by a spiritual vigor, the body of terms associated with it became laden with historical overtones. By the end of the 1640s it was past its prime as a

44. C. Burges, *Two Sermons Preached to the Honorable House of Commons Assembled in Parliament at Their Publique Fast* (London, 1641), 73.

45. E. Calamy, *Gods Free Mercy to England Presented as a Pretious, and Powerful Motive to Humiliation* (London, 1642), 6; D. Featley, *A Second Parallel together with a Writ of Error Sued against the Appealer* (London, 1626), 97; W. Twisse, *Of the Morality of the Fourth Commandment* (London, 1641), 34.

46. E. Reynolds, *Eugenia’s Teares for Great Brittaines Distractions* (London, 1642), 20.

47. E. Calamy, *The Godly Mans Ark, or, City of Refuge in the Day of His Distress* (London, 1657), Epistle Dedicatory; S. Marshall, *The Power of the Civil Magistrate* (London, 1657), 24; and S. Marshall, “The Life of Christ,” in *The Works of Mr Stephen Marshall, Late Minister of the Gospel at Finching-Field in Essex* (London, 1661), 77.

48. T. Gataker, *A Sparke toward the Kindling of Sorrow for Sion* (London, 1621), 10.

49. Calamy, *Gods Free Mercy*, 20; D. Featley, *A Parallel: Of New-Old Pelgiarminian Error* (London, 1626), To the Reader.

50. Burges, *Two Sermons*, 75.

51. Featley, *Second Parallel*, 45.

serviceable descriptor, with other terms taking its place.⁵² In fact, shortly after the death of Charles I in 1649, a member of the Westminster Assembly noted that godly people were now derided as Huguenots—what we *used* to call puritans, he explains.⁵³

This last comment, by Francis Cheynell (bap. 1608, d. 1665), quite sensibly suggests that the use of a negative epithet like “puritan” tended to slide away once the godly were on top of the hill. It also reminds us that puritanism was not, in fact, merely an English phenomenon. During the 1580s and 1640s there were profound Scottish influences on puritanism. During the early decades of the seventeenth century, connections with pious people in the Netherlands were especially strong. During the 1620s and 1630s, American colonists presented a vision that inspired godly people in the mother country, and Irish puritans showed that godly men could lead a Reformed university or rise to the status of archbishop at the very time when the puritan cause in England looked increasingly desperate.⁵⁴ Mid and late century, as France became a painful place for Reformed people, a new strain of fervent Protestant piety entered England from across the Channel, once more altering the mix that was called puritanism. It is because of this international mix of influences, the development of the term over time, the varying reception of the term among the godly, and the activities and associations of puritans themselves that this study contents itself with the simple but apt definition of a puritan cited by Patrick Collinson: the “hotter sort of Protestant.”⁵⁵

The Westminster Assembly contained many hot Protestants, and the assembly itself arguably constitutes an important chapter in the history of the puritan movement. Many of its members spent time in prison for defying the establishment. Indeed, even to meet at the assembly was to defy the direct command of the king. It is also the case, however, that the assembly embodied the diversity that obtained among the godly, a diversity that is evident when considering puritan perspectives on preaching. The membership of the assembly, selected by both houses of Parliament, was also self-selecting in that men chose whether or not to attend. Nonetheless, the choice of the assembly’s members was not dictated by a single parliamentary

52. E. Corbet, *Gods Providence, a Sermon Preached Before the Honourable House of Commons at Their Late Solemne Fast* (London, 1642), 21; James tolerated papists and persecuted puritans, “as they then called men that were seriously and invicibly pious.” F. Cheynell, *Divine Trinitie of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (London, 1650), 470.

53. Cheynell, *Divine Trinitie*, 14. See M. G. Finlayson’s questions in *Historians, Puritanism, and the English Revolution*, 42–76.

54. For the lesser-known case of Ireland, see A. Ford, *James Ussher: Theology, History, and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

55. P. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (1967; Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 27.

vision. In the first place, Parliament was made up of various parties. Second, the matters of the assembly and the nomination of its membership were entwined not only with political concerns but also personal interests—as with any other matter before the Long Parliament. The upside of the lack of a cohesive plan or demographic in choosing assembly members is that, considered individually, these men displayed enough diversity about the practice and theory of preaching that a student of their ministries can discover the essential and peripheral elements of their desired reformation. Considered collectively, the assembly's membership offers a century of working life from men of different temperaments and training and from across different localities, and thus captures the experience and wisdom of generations of godly ministers.

This study enlists a defined cohort of subjects; it also employs a coherent diversity of sources. Chief among them are the minutes of the assembly, revealing both premeditated and extempore comments by assembly members on the widest range of subjects; the papers of the assembly (both printed and manuscript), giving the views of the assembly as a whole; and the writings of individual members penned before, during, and after the event of the assembly. These not only outline the reforms of the assembly and the gathering's collective pulpit theology but also allow us to canvas the views of the assembly's members.

It remains to be said that in analyzing the writings of the assembly and its members on the subject of preaching, I am not restricting myself to a discussion of what might be called the distinguishing marks of puritan preaching, those emphases that set the self-consciously godly preacher apart from the man in the next parish. I think there is a danger of inadvertently underplaying the significance of rather more basic aspects of puritanism in a quest for the unique marks of the godly. The doctrine of Scripture, for example, is not the most obvious place to go if one wishes to hear the things that made puritans tick where others tock. Nonetheless, though the godly did not hold a monopoly on a high view of Scripture, it happens to be at the very heart of puritanism and puritan preaching. Indeed, many characteristics of a puritan preacher are similar to the characteristics of a garden-variety Protestant preacher. What is more, those characteristics that separate or distinguish puritans from other Protestants may not be the features that best explain puritans as people or puritan preachers as preachers. Thus, I seek to identify those aspects of the assembly's reforms that members considered most significant, even though some of those traits are not unique to the assembly. My hope is that this study of the assembly will further conversations about puritanism, post-Reformation theology, and the subject of preaching, and that further studies will in turn correct the faults of this one.